

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Re: H.B. No. 5433 (RAISED) AN ACT CREATING A PROCEDURE FOR PERSONAL CARE ATTENDANTS TO COLLECTIVELY BARGAIN WITH THE STATE.

Good afternoon Chairpersons Prague and Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Maryann Meade. I live in Mansfield, CT with my daughter Kathryn She is 28 years old and was diagnosed with multiple special needs shortly after her premature birth in 1984. The Home and Community Based waiver program, funded by DDS allows her to live at home with her family and participate fully in our community with support from 6 terrific caregivers who have been chosen and uniquely trained by me.

I am here today to explain why I am opposed the passage of this legislation. Frankly, I am shocked to be in opposition of it as it relates to unionization. I was raised in a pro-union household. You see, Frank Ciparelli was my dad. He was involved in local politics all of my life. He was first elected Secretary and later the President of the CT State Association of Letter Carriers. He led the walk out and was briefly jailed during the National strike in March 1970. I keep his old Royal manual as a reminder of his tireless work on behalf of his commitment to the CSALC. Even now, today's letter carriers recognize his name and his remark about his contribution to improve their workplace environment. Needless to say, my dad will always be my hero.

Having said that...I cannot support raised bill 5433. I am opposed to the unionization of my daughter's care givers. Her needs are unique and continue to change as she ages. I currently seek out professionals to better educate me on how to support her as new issues arise. In turn, I train Kate's caregivers and welcome their feedback on how they perceive her response to new strategies and techniques. Recently, she's needed help with tolerating excessive environmental stimulation. She's become more sensitive to light, sound and activity. I sought out Sensory Integration specialists at the River Street School. Kate was evaluated and we formulated a plan to help her when she's unable to process too much stimulation. More importantly, I've been able to share this information with her caregivers which enables them to keep her calm and allows her to again enjoy activities out in the community. That piece is essential to Kate's success.

Her waiver budget is lean. There is enough funding for her to have the coverage that she requires, but that would change dramatically if union dues and an increase in wages were demanded. Kate would have fewer hours of support from the people with whom she's most comfortable. She would potentially lose the relationships with these young women. They have built a strong bond with her and each other. This is not a big business which needs union organization to protect these employees. They are 6 young women who want what's best for my daughter and collaborate well without outside intervention. We work for the same goal... My daughter's success and quality of life at home and in the community. I don't believe that Kate's life or those of her caregivers will be improved by unionization. If anything, it will have a huge negative impact on them and threaten the success of Kate's waiver program future.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opinion. I ask that you vote against this legislation for Kate and let me decide what's best for her and how she should be supported. I'm confident that you will hear similar stories and concerns from other family members today.

Respectfully,

Maryann Meade

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